

The Market Calls for Emancipatory Responses

A promising title. A promising start.

You could almost call it a professional blind date, with curatorial matchmaking. We had a skype call to match up thoughts and interests. Put name to face and voice and character. But it was when we were placed a few doors apart on Suomenlinna, that it was actually possible to share references, books, ideas, background stories, lunches and dinners. Neither of us saw ourselves as curators, both of us had the priority to do our research. Out of these curiosities and professional intimacies a dialogue and exchange emerged.

However, the prologue to the dialogue started originally with Alexandra Grausam and Katja Stecher from studio das weisse haus, Vienna, together with Juha Huuskonen at HIAP–Helsinki International Artist Programme, who both host artists and curators in residence. In an attempt to question the explicit and implicit hierarchical structure of contemporary forms of ‘open’ calls (see also Stecher 2015), the two art institutions jointly developed the format ‘call and response / dialogue and exchange’. The initial call was sent out in Vienna, asking curators and theorists to apply in the form of call that would then later be spread in Helsinki - call, call and response.

We agreed that it would be a good idea to invite others into our dialogue while we stayed on Suomenlinna. It is already hard to encourage busy practicing artists and cultural workers to take the extra time to come to the island, so we offered an easygoing way into our topic of interest, an informal stroll and home-cooked dinner afterwards. We didn’t get large numbers but we had good discussions around the subjects of undisciplinarity, hierarchy and value, as well as dialogue.

‘The Market Calls for Emancipatory Responses’ took up the questions that stand behind the format ‘call and response’. Considering ‘the market’ in its most basic sense, as a framework for enabling exchange, it follows that we can also see artistic and theoretical practices as markets of ideas, as well as practices of critique, entrenched in the very relationships that they try to criticize. Our ambiguous claim that the market calls for emancipatory responses, relates to two issues: The ability of contemporary late capitalism to incorporate and tame critical, radical and subversive tendencies within existing capitalistic structures, indeed, its ability to use counter-capitalist movements for its own adaptive renewal. And furthermore, in light of this ability, the imploring need to look for new formations of exchange—values, motivations, experiences, stories, artefacts, products of labour and desire—all of which call out for a response to the growing inequalities and oppressive transactions.

However, can a distinction between the challenging-of and compliance-with capitalist structures be drawn? How to respond to a call for emancipatory responses?

One possible way ahead from these questions, as the editors of 'Global Justice and Desire' suggest, is to question how specific economic arrangements, like private ownership and/or capitalism, shape specific forms of desire and, vice versa, how specific concepts of desire shape our thinking of possible economic arrangements:

"The conception of desire as *lack* conjures up not only desire's regulation according to binary sex/gender differences and heterosexual coupling, but also the economic register of scarcity." (Dhawan et al. 2015: 8)

With this point, various intersecting and conflicting strands of our project emerge into view.

When in Vienna rather than invite others to come for a walk to discuss the subject, I walk on my own and take pictures and upload them to archive.org, a media commons, which I hope becomes a backdrop for discussion on the economic register of scarcity that is mentioned.. Me, the artist-in-residence staying for 1 month in what seems to be the first cultural space within the neighbourhood.. A temporary-resident migrant male hetero-cis-queered flaneur, embodied curious and open-minded precariat; who does not walk into a bar, cafe, restaurant, clothes-shop, studio, brothel.. Who drifts past the (former?) arbeiterviertel/ working-class and/or immigrant populated neighbourhoods; who can't afford and actually maybe-doesn't-want to participate in the desires & commodities presented, potential social-encounters offered.. On the street projected and reflected outwards, outgoing; Market calls.. It doesn't mean that the desire is not there, just that the forms, systems and ethics they are folded up into are less than ideal, and in some cases abhorrent.. How can we avoid being consumed? How can we promote diversity? How can we care and be cared for? How can we embolden and strengthen ourselves? Reflecting upon what would be an emancipatory response to that which is experienced and witnessed individually, collectively.. There are signs, stickers, traces already on the street.

On the one hand, there is a motivation to look for queer responses, responses that take desire into account, responses that question processes of marginalization based on various axes of difference, for example gender, 'race', sexual orientation, age or class. And then on other hand, the questioning of the economic register of scarcity as a crucial aspect of the established mainstream contemporary art world, in comparison to, say, the new media art world (Shanken, 2016) or more hybrid practices that operate in public space or non-art venues. In other words the tendency to drive towards the singular

and unique, over and above the multitude(s) and the collective(s). This can also apply to the innovation and entrepreneurial influences being applied within knowledge-production worlds of the art academy, research institutes and university. As Jens Kastner (2015) points out with Pierre Bourdieu, there are 'structural boundaries' that distinguish the artistic field from activist movements: Artistic refinement can be seen in contrast to an aim of comprehensibility of political claims and slogans; the individual artist with a proper (trade) name in contrast to a collective movement. Kastner answers the question of what remains from an artists collective's exhibition, even where no individual names are present trenchantly: nothing remains. What is left over from the involvement? Who is responsible for the exchange? There seems to be a desire from the art establishment to identify individuals, to give names. It is important, indeed crucial to unpack and explain what is to be understood by 'market' and value creation in our starting points within art and cultural production.

What's your favourite cafe? Let us meet regularly there. People are always meeting in Viennese cafes, a historical and contemporary public space for exchange.

The narrow perception of what is a 'market' was questioned in our open, public soup-dinner event in the Gallery of das weisse haus, the public event that bracketed the 'Dialogue & Exchange' pilot programme between HIAP and the Viennese partner. By criticizing 'the market' one keeps rotating around it, a roundtable discussion maybe, fixing its supposed centrality and losing out of sight viable alternatives. We need something desirable for many different people, not just in the belly during dark and cold months, but also for future informal strolls too..

The mainstream contemporary art world, with galleries, biennales and art fairs being the main sites of viewing, consuming and exchanging art, are the rather literal globalised markets which mirror and arguably based upon the neoliberal model of economics which perpetuates a direct relationship between scarcity and the commodity value (of the artwork). How can it be a viable terrain for questioning market relations in the first place?

We can and should flip the meaning of 'market' to claim that there is no reason why this work can also to refer to be cooperative, value-based, commons, peer & mutual-aid -orientated markets (of exchange and value-creation). Is there any singular form of 'market' that can be targeted? Who is calling for emancipatory responses? Even if there are various existing modes of production and (re-)distribution that challenge existing capitalistic forms (see, e.g., Gibson-Graham 2006), the question remains: What is the relationship between these alternatives and capitalistic modes of production? How much of it is facilitating exchange outside of the box that the market puts you in? What is desirable or abhorrent? What fills your belly with wealth and nourishment? And, exactly how is participation enabled?

“If we want to ‘change the world,’ alter-globalism must think of the education of the disenfranchised into disinterest in a double bind with the interest of class struggle: ‘democracy.. cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled,’ writes Gramsci. ‘It must mean that every ‘citizen’ can ‘govern’ and that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this.’” (Spivak 2013: 8)

Spending time in each other’s familiar places, intellectually among books, or in the places which hold personal memories. Sharing meals, drinks and sauna are excellent ways to take part, and participate in other worlds, in other person’s frame of reference. Touches beyond the usual, into an Other’s sense of diversity and difference. It doesn’t fully make us the same, but it reduces the barriers. In such exchanges we remake the market according to our own wishes. There is still much much more to do.

Alexander Fleischmann, researcher at the Institute for Gender and Diversity in Organizations, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, was calling for a project partner based in Helsinki, who shares his interest in alternative forms of organizing and diversity/ anti- discrimination. **Andrew Gryf Paterson**, artist-organiser, cultural producer and independent researcher, responded to his call. Together, they exchanged ideas on emancipatory strategies and practices, both within the two of them, but also with the public. At HIAP Suomenlinna they organized weekly informal strolls around the island as well as a final round-up, in Vienna an open roundtable discussion and soup-dinner event was held during the Vienna Art Week.

References

Dhawan, Nikita / Engel, Antke / Govrin, Jule Jakob / Holzhey, Christoph H.E. / Woltersdorff, Volker. (2015). Introduction. In: Dhawan Nikita, Engel Antke, Govrin JJ, Holzhey Christoph H.E. and Woltersdorff Volker (eds) *Global justice and desire: Queering economy*. London u.a.: Routledge, pp. 1–28.

Gibson-Graham JK. (2006). *A postcapitalist politics*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Kastner, Jens. (2015). Über strukturelle Grenzen (hinweg). Was Kunstproduktion und soziale Bewegungen trennt und verbindet. In: Alexander Fleischmann und Doris Guth (eds.): *Kunst - Theorie - Aktivismus. Emanzipatorische Perspektiven auf Ungleichheit und Diskriminierung*. Bielefeld: Transcript, S. 23–58.

Shanken, Edward A. (2016). Contemporary Art and New Media: Digital Divide or Hybrid Discourse? *A Companion to Digital Art*, ed. Christiane Paul. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 463-81.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. (2013). *An aesthetic education in the era of globalization*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Stecher, Katja (2015). Who is calling? Disziplinierungen und Durchkreuzungen im Ausstellungsfeld am Beispiel des Open Call, Master Thesis, ecm educating/curating/managing Programme, University of Applied Arts Vienna.